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ABSTRACT

This document highlights the findings of a committee formed by The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) to assess the status of film at all levels in American education. The introduction by the editor, William Costanzo, stresses that film is best understood in relation to the language arts--not as a "visual aid" but as an integral part of the environment in which students learn to read, write, listen, speak, and otherwise make meaning of their lives. Dale T. Adams, in an essay entitled "An Historical Perspective," presents a survey of the shifting tides of film study in relation to other currents in American education. In "Film Education Research: A Summary," Joan D. Lynch takes a broad look at who is teaching film, including background information, motives, methods, and attitudes, while Jonathan H. Lovell provides a closer look in his essay "Where We Stand," describing in detail three exemplary instructional film programs, at the elementary, secondary, and college levels. Finally, Brian Gallagher's essay entitled "Film Study in the English Language Arts: Technology and the Future of Pedagogy," considers how new changes in technology are likely to influence the course of film study in the near future. (References are attached.) (NKA)

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REPORT ON FILM STUDY IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

prepared by
The NCTE Committee on Film Study In the English Language Arts
Summer 1987

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INTRODUCTION
William Costanzo

In 1983, the NCTE Committee on Film Study was formed to study the status of film at all levels of education. The committee assembled a group of leaders in the field of media education, solicited information and materials, pored over the professional literature, examined recent surveys, and met with educators at special confere e sessions and workshops. We were impressed by the remarkably high quality of film-related work being carried out by talented teachers. We were equally impressed by how little of this work is known beyond local settings. We also identified trends which we believe ought to be more widely understood if educators are to make the most informed decisions about the role of media in our schools.

This report presents some of the highlights of our findings. It begins with an historical overview. Dale T. Adams traces the shifting tides of film study in relation to other currents in American education. He sees a greater acceptance of film among today's teachers as well as a broader range of uses, suggesting that the place of film within American schools may have become less dependent on short-range trends. The report continues with a summary of the most recent surveys. Joan Lynch takes a broad look at who is teaching film, their backgrounds, motives, methods, and attitudes. Then Jonathan H. Lovell provides a closer look. He describes how individual teachers are using film in their classes and analyzes in detail three programs which he considers to be

exemplary. Finally, Brian Gallagher offers a speculative view. He considers how new changes in technology are likely to influence the course of film study in the near future.

After three years of taking--and occasionally quickening--the pulse of film education within the profession, the Committee on Film Study has made several recommendations. Within NCTE, it stresses the importance of creating new opportunities for teachers to learn about and develop more effective ways to teach film and use films in their classes. This means an expanded program of media-related workshops, concurrent sessions, and special events at NCTE conventions. It means more publications like the special issue of TETYC on Film, Television, and Video (Teaching English in the Two-Year College, December 1986) as well as an up-to-date selection of NCTE books on media. We support the creation of an NCTE Assembly on Media Arts as an ongoing forum for discussing crosscurrents among film, other media, and the English language arts. For many teachers today, film is best understood in relation to the language arts--not as a "visual aid," but as an integral part of the environment in which our students learn to read, write, listen, speak, and otherwise make meaning of their lives.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
Dale T. Adam

If one is not overly concerned with nationalistic niceties about who did what first, it is generally acknowledged that

audiences watched motion pictures for the first time in 1895. By 1911, when the National Council of Teachers of English was formed, the motion picture, both as an art and an industry, was already recognized as a medium of tremendous sociological, educational, and artistic possibilities. As such, motion pictures--primarily because of their affinity with other narrative literature, came under the varying degrees of purview of teachers of English and has remained so until the present time.

In fact, early film concerns of the NCTE from 1911 to approximately 1920 were restricted to silent film versions of the "classics" of print literature. During this period a majority of English teachers considered film study inferior to the study of "legitimate" literature, although films could be used to stimulate composition. Where film study was given any positive artistic consideration, it was done so by energetic but maverick teachers of English.

Nevertheless, in the twenties and thirties film study made its way into the secondary English curriculum for the first time with some degree of acceptance. This interest was generated essentially by a negative concern: the fear that movies were having negative effects on students. This interest culminated in a series of studies sponsored by the Payne Fund between 1929 and 1932. Designed to investigate the influence of movies on children, the Payne Fund Studies were moralistic and didactic in their conclusions, aiming primarily to keep children from

attending movies and to raise standards in film appreciation.

Throughout the twenties and thirties, this concern for raising standards in film appreciation was reflected in the work of NCTE and its Photoplay Committee. But even this interest abated with the coming of World War II. Then, after the war, interest in film study continued to decline -- first because the war-time use of film had created a new view of film as a "visual aid" and just one of several media in a whole "audio-visual aid" movement in education. Secondly, the coup de grace to the study of film came with the Sputnik era, which dealt the fatal blow to anything that even hinted at being academically frivolous. In fact, as late as 1968 film study was virtually dead; and again where it was being kept alive at all, it was kept alive by energetic but maverick teachers of English.

Nevertheless, if film study in the schools was moribund in 1968, by 1973 it was very much alive. Just as in the twenties NCTE's interest in film study was as a respondent to rather than a leader in the advent of a new and emerging art form, so to in the seventies NCTE was a respondent. But this time NCTE was responding on a more positive level to an established art form.

That is to say, by the 1970s recognition of the works of early film theorists had established film as an art form and had influenced a new wave of young, talented directors of foreign films. Subsequently, an influx to the United States of aesthetically high calibre foreign films had snared from the watchers of aesthetically unrewarding television fare a new

audience for film, an audience made up primarily of young people whom critic Stanley Kauffman labeled "the film generation." That film generation, and out of it a host of new young directors, had taken a new look at Hollywood and filmmaking; the result was a new wave of American films of unquestionable merit. In addition, new critics, influenced by France's Cahiers du Cinema, had also taken a different look at traditional Hollywood genres as well as established Hollywood directors and enlightened audiences to art where art had not been seen before. The Marshall McLuhan explosion had created a virtual zeitgeist of media awareness, radically changing teacher attitudes in favor of the serious study of all electronic media--including motion pictures. Energetic disciples of McLuhan--many of whom were English teachers--had become the Gideons of film study in the school curriculum. Under their influence the audio-visual aid concept of film had been eliminated. A proliferation of superb short films had established the short film as a new film genre and eliminated the age-old obstacle of how to show a film in a fifty-minute class period. The American Film Institute, only a dream in the early sixties, had been founded as was lending support and leadership to the renaissance of film awareness. A phase-elective concept had sufficiently revitalized secondary English curricula to include the study of film. And literary critics had broadened the scope of the definition of literature so that film was an acceptable genre for study in the English curricula of colleges and universities. Finally, textbooks and

supporting materials for teaching film abounded. In summary, by 1980, a renaissance of film study was in its zenith.

In the 1980s, film study in many cases has been the first casualty of a "back-to-basics" movement that has also eliminated many phase-elective curricula that nourished film study. Yet film study has achieved tacit acceptance as a proper concern of the discipline, and the question of film in the English classroom for film-oriented English teachers is, in general, no longer "why" but "how"; that is to say, how to teach film. More important, that how continues to be the concern not of just a few energetic mavericks but of a broad spectrum of teachers of English and with the support of the National Council of Teachers of English.

FILM EDUCATION RESEARCH: A SUMMARY

Joan D. Lynch

This summary includes four of the most recent studies on film education. Two surveys of our nation's colleges (Bohnenkamp 1978, Pryluck 1982) describe degree programs and courses offered in film and video. Two surveys of secondary (Lynch, 1983) and elementary (Kristo, 1984/85) schools describe the types and sources of films used, the purpose for using film, and the methods of teaching film. All four surveys attempt to determine the academic training of instructors who teach film.

These four surveys show that film study on all levels is strongly tied to the teacher of literature: most college teachers of film hold degrees in English (62.8%); and on the secondary and

elementary levels, film is taught primarily by English or language arts teachers. Most teachers on all levels have little formal training in film study or production. In fact, half of the teachers surveyed by Pryluck and Hemenway teach film/video courses for which they have had no formal training. These findings suggest that the primary method employed in teaching film may be a literary one, with little attention paid to film as a constructed object.

Film as a discipline is ill-defined. On the college level, film teachers have widely different backgrounds and divergent interests as evidenced by the degrees they hold and the organizations to which they belong. These facts, coupled with the diversity of college courses offered in film and the widely divergent placement of film courses in 12 different departments, indicate the lack of unanimity in the discipline, especially in terms of possible film/video program models. The fact that fewer than one-third of the colleges offering film and television courses have degree programs suggests that film-video study on the college level may be as ancillary to the discipline in which it is housed as it is on the high school level to the study of English.

Most secondary English teachers (92%) and elementary school teachers (78%) use film in their classrooms. The former use instructional films primarily, though most compare a film with a novel, play, or short story sometime during the term. Their basic approach to film teaching is thematic analysis and they use the

film to introduce, reinforce, or clarify literary concepts. The chief reason elementary school teachers use film is also as a support to the curriculum. They use slightly more fiction films than instructional films.

Though film is being used by secondary and elementary language arts teachers, only a small percentage of these teachers feel they are teaching film, and only three percent of high school students surveyed have taken a film course. Yet over 75 percent of college teachers believe that film and video ought to be taught on the lower levels.

WHERE WE STAND
Jonathan H. Lovell

Throughout the 1984-5 academic year, the Committee on Film Study in the English Language Arts made a series of appeals through professional publications for evidence of the various ways that teachers, from kindergarten to university, were using film and television in their English and language arts classrooms. The materials sent to the committee as a result of these requests revealed a wide array of diverse and often quite inventive uses of these powerful and pervasive media.

Some of the major categories into which these uses fell are listed below, together with the instructor and curriculum best embodying a number of these categories.

The use of film and television:

-- To establish a social context for understanding spoken language among ESL students (Susan Stempleski's use of the film Breaking Away at Hunter College)

-- To move students from "where they are" as television viewers to "where they might be" as academic writers (Vera Jiji's use of television drama to teach writing at Brooklyn College)

-- To help demystify writing as an activity for students by documenting how professional writers write (Alice Trillin and Jane Garmey's Writers Writing film series)

-- To provide visual "texts" for deaf students

-- To encourage communication skills generally

-- To provide access to otherwise remote or intimidating audiences (Don Curran's filmmaking class for learning disabled junior high students in the New York City public schools)

-- To introduce students to the functions and purposes of media generally, by the suggestion of a typology of forms (Joan Driscoll Lynch's media studies classes at Villanova)

-- To develop a critical awareness among viewers analogous to the critical consciousness that the teaching of reading and writing can promote (Shoshanna Knapp's program at Virginia Polytechnical Institute; Barbra Morris' media literacy classes at the University of Michigan)

-- To protect students from the threatening powerful suggestiveness of film and television

-- To introduce students to modes of writing and genres of literature by their analogy to similar film types (Ann Dobie's film/literature program at Louisiana State University)

Despite the wide diversity of uses of film and television in English and language arts classes that this list suggests, however, it is clear from the letters accompanying the packets received by the Committee that at present there is virtually no coordination or communication among those teachers interested in this area of study and practice.

The purpose of the remainder of this section, then, will not be to further document the extent to which film and television are used in English and language arts classrooms, but rather to highlight three exemplary programs--at the elementary, secondary, and high school levels--in order to suggest some models and rationale for a more systematic and self-conscious attention to the place of film and television in our English Language Arts curriculum.

Elementary Level -- Carole Cox
(University of Louisiana, Baton Rouge)

In her work with the training of elementary language arts teachers in the Baton Rouge area, Carole Cox stresses no single approach or program, but rather the integration of what a young learner might be taught about viewing and making films and video

tapes into a larger, holistic language learning program.

In her workshop classes, Cox encourages K-8 teachers to explore the connections they might make in their language arts curriculum between visual and verbal language learning and language producing. This focus on an interactive language environment, where children are reading richly illustrated works of children's literature and are encouraged to produce similarly richly integrated visual/verbal texts themselves, offers what is perhaps the most productive and promising model for the use of film and television, along with other visual media, in the K-8 language arts curriculum.

As Howard Gardner has suggested in Artful Scribbles, moreover, there are certain dimensions of the elementary child's emerging perception of his or her world that are best captured in visual rather than verbal narratives. Tracing the successive depictions of the Star Wars story that his son drew before and after seeing the film, Gardner shows how the opportunity to render this story visually helped his son come to terms with his emerging understanding of the place and presence of destructive forces in the world. These visual narratives, Gardner argues, provided a more powerful and appropriate mode of expression for his seven year old, an avenue for the expression of his understanding that words were neither sufficient nor appropriate to perform.

This recognition of the power and occasionally the

preeminence of visual over verbal modes of expression provides one of the most compelling rationales for the type of integrated language arts program in the elementary years that Carole Cox advocates in her workshop teacher-training classes.

High School Level -- Ralph Amelio
(Willowbrook HS in Villa Park, Illinois)

From 1968 to 1971, Ralph Amelio conducted and documented a program in the teaching of film at the high school level which was given the name "The Willowbrook Cinema Study Project." The results of his study are contained in his extremely useful and thoughtful book, Film in the Classroom.

Starting with the premise that for every book the average high school student reads, he or she views twenty films, and perhaps influenced by perceptions such as those voiced by John Goodlad, in A Place Called School, that the distance between students' goals and objectives for themselves and teachers' goals for their students increases quite dramatically during the high school years, Ralph Amelio designed a year-long program introducing his students to the language and genre of film.

Knowing the value of providing adolescent learners with a personalized, participatory sense of what they were coming to understand, Amelio set goals for the course which combined a hands-on approach to learning (the student as participant-observer, coming to his or her own criteria for evaluating films) with an introduction to a new body of knowledge

(the film medium as a distinctive art form) closely related to students' own experience.

Amelio's project was divided into ten units: Film and Literature; Film Language; The Adolescent; The Documentary; Animation; War & Violence in Film; Art & Fantasy; The Western; On-Style. It continually engaged adolescent viewers as both responders and evaluators of what they saw. Students were asked to work together in groups to develop valid criteria by which they could evaluate the films they were watching, and to test these criteria against each new genre of films they were introduced to in successive units.

It is in the unit on "The Adolescent: Through a Lens Starkly," however, that one senses the particular power and perception of Amelio's program for the age group he is teaching. "This unit was the most jam-packed of all our units," Amelio writes, "with a variety of meaningful, relevant activities. It was also the one in which our students did the most work--possibly the most intensive work in their high school careers, if their responses were of any validity" (57). The connection that Amelio was able to draw in this unit between the intense, vivid, and often confusing world of the middle adolescent, and the opportunity he was able to offer them both to see this world reflected in an equally intense medium and to begin to "make sense" of this "chaotic world" through their analysis and evaluation of the films they viewed, provides a

strong and compelling rationale for the place and importance of film study in the high school language arts curriculum.

College Level: William Costanzo
(Westchester Community College, Valhalla, New York)

In Double Exposure: Composing Through Writing and Film, William Costanzo writes that his program relating film to writing at the college level "is meant to be a kind of double exposure to the collaborative powers of the visual image and the written word." His hope, he goes on to write, is that students "will develop their ability to compose, interpret, and communicate ideas by uniting, and thus strengthening, their skills of seeing and writing."

In thus uniting the two most powerful and pervasive forms of communication and persuasion that his students encounter in their lives outside the classroom, Costanzo's program gives students what Shirley Brice Heath would call a "fast forward introduction to school literacy," insofar as this world of school literacy at the college level is mirrored by the required freshman composition program. Using what he calls "the modeling power of the screen," Costanzo organizes his program around a sequence of analogies between what his students already know experientially as viewers of film and television and what they need to know as writers of essays. The purpose is avowedly one of enabling students to make sense of the requirements that presently typify most entry level composition programs, rather than challenging the validity or usefulness of these requirements, but in the

process of providing this enabling technique, Costanzo's program helps to develop in students a sense of confidence and enthusiasm that is rarely seen in conventional freshman composition classes.

As an observer/evaluator of several of Costanzo's classes during the 1979-80 academic year, I was able to see at first hand how effective his program could be for students first entering the world of college level instruction and uncertain about their ability to perform adequately in that world. My favorite example from these observations concerns the method that Costanzo uses to introduce his students to the difficult concept of "style," and its influence on our understanding of what is expressed (97-8). After a short introduction to the topic, Costanzo turns on the videotape he has prepared for the class and we see and hear Jimmy Breslin extolling the virtues of Piels as a "drinking man's beer." With very little comment following this memorable television ad, Costanzo then has his students view a second ad, this time portraying Orson Welles comparing Paul Masson wines to great works of literature, endeavors that "take time" to "reach their prime." Within the space of a few minutes of viewing time, Costanzo has presented his students with not only a vividly memorable example of how two contrasting styles influence our response to the products they promote, but also an extremely useful 'key' to recalling and making sense of the concept of "style" itself.

In thus emphasizing that "images, like words, act as signs," and that our ability to gain a sense of mastery over our world

depends in part on our ability to make sense of these signs--to interpret them intelligently and actively--Costanzo's program offers for beginning college-level writers an exuberant and effective way to build bridges from their vast experience as television and film viewers towards their new experiences as a college-level writers. In many cases, these bridges provide a route into a world that has often had one sign only for the expectant freshman composition student: Access Denied.

As these three exemplary programs suggest, the movement to integrate film and television into the English Language Arts curriculum is closely connected to that larger movement to re-think our curriculum in "student-centered" terms. As we learn to see our students as active, participating learners in an ongoing process of meaning making, we will increasingly see the need to incorporate both visual and verbal texts into our classrooms, for it is these texts that reflect that larger culture we know exists beyond the walls of our classrooms, and the intensely integrative nature of that world, both as it is prestented and perceived.

FILM STUDY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF PEDAGOGY

Brian Gallagher

It should be said straight out that with the advent of the videocassette recorder the future of film in the English Language Arts is already upon us--and, indeed, one of the pedagogical

tasks of the next decade may well be discovering the most efficacious ways of employing this omnipresent piece of technology. The predictions below work outward from the instructional centrality of the VCR in the near future to the use and pedagogical effects of allied forms of technology.

1. THE NEW VIDEO TECHNOLOGY, BECAUSE IT PERMITS AND SO ENCOURAGES A CONCENTRATION ON THE "MICRO-SKILLS" OF VISUAL ANALYSIS, WILL BRING THE STUDY OF FILM AND OF LITERATURE CLOSER TOGETHER. Already the ability to stop and study, to rewind and review a sequence on a VCR makes viewing a film in class a more valuable, more analytic way to see a film than on a 16mm projector. Mise-en-scene, foregrounding, cutting patterns, camera movements can, really for the first time, be studied by a whole class of students, and restudied in small groups or individually. As a result, it is entirely possible that by century's end film will come to take a permanent place in the English Language Arts curriculum, much like, if not as important as, the place literature will continue to hold--for film can now be discussed and scrutinized as closely, and by some of the same critical means, as literature.

2. VISUAL LITERACY AND LANGUAGE LITERACY WILL INCREASINGLY REFLECT EACH OTHER AND SO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE A FRUITFUL INSTRUCTIONAL WAY OF MOVING FROM SEEING/INTERPRETING TO LEARNING/PRACTICING THE ACT OF WRITING. Even if the study of film per se does not become a regular part of the English Language Arts curriculum, film will very probably become a much

more important adjunct in the teaching of writing. Students practicing description, for example, might look at a one-minute sequence of actions from a film, viewing it over and over, freezing it at appropriate points to check details, until they are able to write a complete prose description of all the action that takes place. Such patterns as comparison-and-contrast, organization by imagistic clusters, process analysis and localized description can be demonstrated very easily and efficiently with short segments of film, then applied to writing students are doing. (see Costanzo and Spielberger)

3. THE MICROCOMPUTER WILL BECOME AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN VISUAL AND WRITTEN TEXTS, AND SO HELP FOSTER THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FILM AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE. The microcomputer is an instrument capable of producing, with relative ease, both complex graphics and visually varied text. Although reading and, to some extent, writing have always been visual activities, using the computer as a writing instrument obviously makes writing a more visual act by putting words up there on the (aptly-named) video display terminal, televising the words before printing them. There will inevitably be a carryover effect as students of the future move between writing on the computer screen and analyzing visual media like film.

4. LASER DISK TECHNOLOGY WILL, TO SOME EXTENT, SUPPLANT VIDEOCASSETTE TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM. In an educational setting, laser disk versions of films might become the more sensible way to maintain a film library. Certainly, films on

disks cost little more than films on tape--and their great advantage is that they are virtually resistant to the usual kind of wear and tear that gives tapes a relatively short life in many educational settings. A significant number of films are now becoming available in the cheaper, but less educationally preferable, CLV (Constant Linear Velocity) format, through which a feature-length film can be put on a single disk. If more films are produced in the CAV (Constant Angular Velocity) format, teachers will have virtually indestructible versions of films from which they can call up any frame, shot or sequence in a matter of seconds (since each frame is numbered and has its own groove) and freeze frames on the screen for as long as they want without doing any damage to the disk.

5. THE NEW TECHNOLOGY WILL, IN MANY MANIFESTATIONS, IMITATE ITS PREDECESSORS' FORMS, WHETHER EFFICIENTLY OR NOT. Videocassette players resemble audiocassette players in the way their controls work, and computer keyboards resemble typewriter keyboards in their layout, although one could argue that ultimate functionality is being sacrificed for familarity in such designs. The tendency toward replication of forms will probably have certain negative consequences for media technology in the classroom. For instance, both videotape and laser disks will probably still have been played in machines attached to conventional television sets, rather than in machines (admittedly more expensive and more limited) with self-contained projection units which could provide larger, clearer,

better-colored pictures. On the positive side, there will probably be the invention of some useful pieces of accessory technology. One could imagine coin-operated photocopy machines, like those presently attached to some microfilm readers, which could produce a photocopy of whatever film frame is frozen on the screen, surely a help for students writing and illustrating papers on film and film-related topics.

6. A NEW KIND OF HYBRID TEXT, WRITTEN AND GRAPHIC AND PERHAPS EVEN SPOKEN, MAY COME TO REPLACE, IN PART, THE KIND OF TRADITIONAL EXPOSITORY ESSAY WE NOW REQUIRE OF WRITING STUDENTS. In the opinion of one well-respected writer on English Language Arts, "the true power of the videodisc should emerge through as-yet-undeveloped interactive programs that combine print, image and sound..." (Suhor 106). If such programs are developed to the point where they allow the user sufficient control to produce what is essentially his or her own text, English Language Arts teachers may well have to become knowledgeable enough about these multi-media texts to teach, assign and evaluate them. Undoubtedly, film and video and television would, in some form, play a significant (and intriguing) rhetorical role in contributing their matter and influence to these mixed forms.

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